

Matthew Lowber House  
North Main Street  
Magnolia  
Kent County  
Delaware

HABS No. DE-182

HABS  
DEL,  
1-MAG,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS  
DEL,  
1-MAG,  
2 -

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MATTHEW LOWBER HOUSE

HABS No. DE-182

Location: East side of North Main Street (U.S. 113-A) about 200 yards north of its intersection with County Road 107, Magnolia, Kent County, Delaware. Located 100 yards southeast at time of recording; moved in 1980.

USGS Frederica Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 18.458780.4324660.

Present Owner: Joseph P. Eberly, Box 42, Manokin, Maryland 21836.

Present Use: Vacant.

Statement of Significance: The Lowber House, constructed in 1774, is a typical Delaware, three-bay, hall-and-parlor farmhouse. The southern, gable end of this brick structure bears the initials of its builder, Matthew Lowber, and the construction date. The interior of this single-pile dwelling retains its original, fully-panelled, fireplace end wall, cornice, and chair rail trim. Until 1845, the Lowber House was the only known dwelling at the crossroads, which later became the site of the town of Magnolia.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1774. The owner's initials and the date are near the peak of the southern gable in glazed headers.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the Lowber House stands. Reference is the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Kent County.

1774: Matthew Lowber, Jr. built the house in 1774. The initials ML are his and not his father's, since his father died in 1772. Peter Lowber became the next owner of the house after his father died intestate.

In 1789 the Court of Common Pleas ordered the land of Peter Lowber to be sold to the highest bidder at a public sale. Joseph Barker was the highest bidder and he paid Sheriff Molleston, but the Sheriff "...had not made and executed a deed of conveyance..." to Joseph Barker. In 1805 the Court of Common Pleas ordered Sheriff Lockwood to execute a deed, which was recorded in 1807.

1807: Deed May 25, 1807 recorded May 28, 1807, in Book K2,  
pags 83-85.

Sheriff David Lockwood  
to  
Joseph Barker

"...all the said Peter Lowbers share or dividend of  
his Father Matthew Lowbers real Estate said to contain  
about one hundred and forty seven acres...." No  
mention of building. Price: 470.

1808: Deed October 19, 1808 recorded November 25, 1808, in  
Book L2, pages 15-16.

Joseph Barker  
to  
Jonathan Manlove

"...Joseph Barker by his Bond of Alienation or writing  
obligatory..." on October 23, 1801 became bound to  
Jonathan Manlove for \$2,000 for which Joseph Barker  
would give Jonathan Manlove "...all that tract or  
parcel of land and brick house... being part of the  
lands late of Peter Lowber (son of Matthew) sold by  
Henry Molleston esquire former Sheriff of Kent  
County...to Joseph Barker...." 100 acres. Price:  
\$2,000.

John Orrell bought the property from Jonathan Manlove  
(the deed is missing from the Deed Index for Kent  
County). The 1815 deed from Jonathan Manlove to John  
Marim mentions the transaction.

1809: Deed April 5, 1809 recorded April 11, 1809, in Book  
L2, pages 68-69.

Sheriff William Clarke  
to  
Jonathan Manlove

John Orrell (a merchant from Kent County) had his land  
seized because of his inability to pay for damages  
caused by non-performance of an agreement. This deed  
conveys 110 acres with no mention of a building.  
Price: \$3,000.

An 1809 Kent County Assessment for Murderkill Hundred  
shows Jonathan Manlove as having "...103 acres of land  
B House and Store House...."

1815: Deed November 28, 1808 recorded April 27, 1815, in  
Book P2, pages 142-143.

Jonathan Manlove & Wife  
to  
John Marim

Land that "...Jonathan Manlove formerly purchased from  
Joseph Barker...which said Jonathan Manlove sold to  
John Orrell and repurchased the same at the sale of  
the Real Estate of the said John Orrell by the Sheriff  
of Kent County...." 103-1/4 acres. Price: \$4,000.

1817: Deed August 4, 1817 recorded November 26, 1817, in  
Book R2, pages 334-336.

Hannah Marim  
to  
James Bateman and Susan his Wife

Hannah, widow of John Marim, gave up her claims to  
widow's thirds on her husband's lands in exchange for  
a yearly payment of cash. James Bateman and Susan  
Marim Bateman were to pay \$150 on January 1st for the  
remainder of Hannah's natural life. 117 acres.

Illustrated in Kent County Orphans Court Book H, page  
50, is a plot of a section of John Marim's estate that  
contains the Lowber House. Dated February 17, 1818.

1818: Deed November 19, 1918 recorded December 3, 1818, in  
Book 52, pages 101-102.

James Bateman and Wife and Hannah Marim  
to  
James Mellechop

The farm tract "...whereon the said James Bateman now  
lives...known by the name Lombardy Grove...." 110  
acres. Price: \$3,000.

1B21: Deed December 3, 1821 recorded on the same date in  
Book V2, pages 43-46.

Sheriff Willard Saulsbury  
to  
Samuel Longstreth

Samuel Longstreth and Joshua Baily, Jr. brought a suit  
against James Mellechop. Sheriff Richard Harrington  
sold the property to Samuel Longstreth but the Sheriff  
died soon after the sale. Longstreth had made only a

partial payment and paid the remainder to the administrators of Richard Harrington's estate. He then petitioned the Court of Common Pleas to order Sheriff Willard Saulsbury to make out a deed. This deed conveys a tract of land adjoining the lands of Joseph Barker and the Quaker Meeting house. 95 acres. Price: \$2,360.

An 1822 Kent County Assessment Book lists in Murderkill Hundred "...Longstreth and Baily of Phila. 110 acres land late Marum (sic) good house...."

1825: Deed January 6, 1825 recorded December 22, 1825, in Book Z2, pages 16-17.

Samuel Longstreth and Wife  
to  
Joshua Longstreth

Mentions the tract "...Lombardy Grove..." but has no mention of a building. 110 acres. Price: \$1,925.

An 1837 Kent County Assessment Book lists in Murderkill Hundred a "...Joshua Longstreth Phila. 110 acres of land. 20 of which is woodland 2 story brick dwelling and store house in bad repair, outhouses in bad repair in tenure of John Wells...."

1841: Deed January 25, 1841 recorded January 27, 1841, in Book P3, pages 94-96.

Joshua Longstreth and Wife  
to  
Alexander Orr

Mentions the tract "Lombardy Grove" but has no mention of a building. 110 acres. Price: \$2,000.

An 1845 Kent County Assessment Book lists in Murderkill Hundred, "...Alexander Orr 90 acres of land. A part of which is woodland. Mantion (sic) 2 story Brick Dwelling in midling repair. Frame Barn Stable and carriage house in midling repair."

Deed Book P3 also contains a mortgage taken out by Alexander Orr dated and recorded at the same time as the deed. On the back it is marked, "...This mortgage is duly Satisfied and Paid. December 28, 1850."

1850: Deed November 6, 1850 recorded December 13, 1850, in Book A4, pages 75-76.

Alexander Orr  
to  
William Caulk

Mentions the tract "Lombardy Grove" but has no mention of a building. It also mentions the sale of several parts of the tract by Alexander Orr totaling 31 acres. 80 acres. Price: \$2,500.

1853: Deed November 4, 1852 recorded May 2, 1853, in Book E4, pages 166-167.

Sheriff John S. Kersey  
to  
John F. Gordon

Alexander Orr had a suit against William Caulk in the Superior Court of Kent County. On October 12, 1852 the land was sold at auction to John F. Gordon. The deed mentions the tract "...White House property...two story brick dwelling house Kitchen storehouse barn stables and other outbuildings...." 90 acres. Price: \$1,750.

1853: Deed December 20, 1852 recorded May 2, 1853, in Book E4, pages 167-168.

John F. Gordon  
to  
George S. May

Mentions the tract "White House property" but has no mention of a building. 90 acres. Price: \$2,037.20.

An 1852 Kent County Assessment Book lists in Murderkill Hundred, George S. May "...90 acres of land. 80 are improved, 10 are in branch and cripple with a two story brick dwelling and smoke house frame barn stables and also frame store house all in bad repair in tenure of William Savin...."

1854: Deed December 12, 1854 recorded February 1, 1855, in Book H4, pages 227-228.

George S. May  
to  
Edmund Stout

Mentions the tract "White House property" but no mention of a building. 90 acres. Price: \$4,350.

Edmund Stout took out a mortgage on the property. It is in Deed Book H4, pages 228-229. On the back of the mortgage is written the following: "1864 September 14th. This Mortgage is fully satisfied and paid."

An 1860 Kent County Assessment lists in Murderkill Hundred, "...Edmund Stout 95 acres of land, 75 improved. 20 in branch timber, with a two story, brick dwelling and Kitchen, Barn, stables, old store, house in tol. rep...." An 1868 assessment also describes the property. Beers Atlas, 1869, shows Edmund Stout owning the Lowber House at the crossroads that was by then called Magnolia. Deed Book E7 (last page) has a plot of Magnolia in 1890 that shows Edmund Stout as the owner of the property.

1899: Deed February 23, 1899 recorded same date in Book C8, pages 319-321.

Edmund Stout  
to  
Caleb S. Van Burkalow

Mentions the tract "White House property" but has no mention of a building. 90 acres. Price: \$5,000. A copy of the deed is in the Delaware Archives.

1902: Deed May 24, 1902 recorded same date in Book P8, pages 207-209.

Caleb S. Van Burkalow et ux  
to  
Benjamin White

Mentions the tract "White House property...Same as bought of Edmund Stout by Caleb S. Van Burkalow...." 80 acres. Price: \$4,700. A copy of the deed is in the Delaware Archives.

1964: Deed August 7, 1964 recorded same date in Book Q23, pages 539-541.

Mabel M. White (Widow)  
to  
Howard B. Carter et ux

The lot "...having improvements of an old brick and frame mansion house and sundry outbuildings...." 41 acres. Price: \$27,500.

"Residue of all the same lands conveyed to Benjamin White by deed from Caleb S. Van Burkalow, May 24, 1902."

1969: Deed May 28, 1969 recorded same date in Book R25, pages 301-303.

Howard B. Carter, et ux  
to  
The State of Delaware for the use of The Public  
Archives Commission

Part of land conveyed to the Carters by Mabel White.  
0.595 acres. Price: \$20,000.

A document entitle, "Abstract of Title - Van Burkalow farm, purchased by M. M. White" is in the Delaware Archives. It referred to the deeds from 1821 to 1902 and gave their reference numbers.

4. Alterations and Additions:

South Wing: An 1818 Orphans Court Plot (Book H, page 50; included here as field records) shows a wing on the south side of the house. This side has the marks of the roof line of what was a story-and-a-half addition.

North Wing: The frame wing presently standing was probably built between 1860-1867. The 1860 assessment values the property at about \$2,900. The 1868 assessment values it at \$7,200; this would suggest that some significant improvement was made on the property. An insurance policy with the Kent County Mutual Insurance Company, dated 1867, describes the frame and brick house with the dimensions that exist today. The frame part is described as "...All New and good..." which supports the period 1860-1868 as the time of its construction.

It is possible that there was an addition on the north side earlier than the frame one, although it is not represented in the 1818 Orphans Court Book illustration. The brick wall on that side has very rough brickwork for what would have been an outside wall, and there is a trace of what appears to be the plaster line of an addition on that side.

Other additions: On the rear (east) side of the house there was a frame addition that appeared to date from the early twentieth century. It was torn down by the State in 1975, as was the front porch.

The tract name for the property changed between 1850 and 1853 from "Lombardy Grove" to "White House property." This could possibly indicate the date when the house was whitewashed.



In 1980 the house was moved to its present site, about 100 yards northwest of its original site. Since that time, the present owner has been restoring the house. He removed a partition, uncovered original paint, re-plastered, re-hung windows, opened fireplaces and installed plumbing and electricity.

B. Historical Events Personages:

Matthew Lowber, Jr., the builder of the house, was a slave owner and a farmer.

Jonathan Manlove of Philadelphia "...lately of Kent County...", John Orrell of Kent County, Samuel Longstreth of Philadelphia, and Joshua Longstreth of Philadelphia, were all merchants at the time that they owned the Matthew Lowber House.

John Marim was active in Delaware politics. He is listed as a member of the State House of Representatives from 1803-1811, with the exception of the year 1807. His son, Charles Marim, was a prominent Delaware lawyer. Research suggests that neither John nor Charles Marim lived in the Matthew Lowber House.

Alexander Orr was mentioned in the 1841 deed as a farmer when he bought the property. There does not seem to have been a store on the property after 1841. Scharf's History of Delaware says that 10 buildings were constructed in what became the town of Magnolia, including at least one store in 1845. It is possible that the new store, or stores, could have made the Lowber property store uncompetitive.

Prepared by: James Stewart  
Historian  
Delaware Division of Historical  
and Cultural Affairs  
1975

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This house is a typical Delaware farmhouse built in the late eighteenth century.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The brick portion measures 32'-3" x 20'-2", the frame portion 18'-4" x 20'-2". The building is rectangular, two-and-a-half stories.

2. Foundations: Brick, common bond.
3. Walls: Flemish-bond brick with glazed headers on the southeast gable end. The southwest front has been painted gray, and the northeast side has been stuccoed. On the southwest front there is a belt course at the second-floor line. High on the southeast gable are the initials "M L" and "1774" in glazed headers, with a part of another initial visible under the stucco on the chimney.

The northwest addition has clapboard siding with corner boards, partially painted.

4. Structural system, framing: In the brick portion, there are arched brick supports with corbeled hearth supports at each chimney. There are brick bearing walls, hand-hewn oak floor joists and roof rafters. In the frame addition, there is wood frame construction with vertical brick piers for fireplace supports.
5. Porches: A wooden porch at the main entrance of the southwest front was removed just after the HABS recording in 1975. It had a shed roof, beaded wood panel ceiling, wood floor, concrete steps, and a bench on each end. There is a gable-roofed hood at the door to the kitchen on the front.
6. Chimneys: There is a brick chimney on each end of the house and one in the middle at the end of the original brick portion of the house. The chimney on the southeast end is partially plastered.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance on the southwest front was moved from its original position in the center of the original brick structure. This original doorway was changed to a window and the door is now located between that window and another one on the front. There is also evidence of a door opposite the original, on the rear.

There is a door centered in the frame addition on the front and rear sides. Doors are paneled wood. An exterior door to the cellar is on the southeast end of the house near the rear. This is a wood plank double door with steel strap hinges, wood frame and brick segmental-arch lintel.

- b. Windows and shutters: Wooden windows on the ground floor had nine-over-one-light single-hung sash and paneled wood shutters. Second-floor windows have six-over-nine-light single-hung sashes which were removed at the time of recording. In the recent restoration, the second-floor sash were reinstalled and the first-floor sash were changed

to nine-over-nine-light sash. Louvered shutters, dating from the mid nineteenth century and not original to the house, were hung on the second-floor windows in 1982. The first-floor windows have brick jack arches with projecting keystones on the front and wood lintels over the rear windows. The cellar openings have segmental arches.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with a rib-seam metal covering.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Eaves are boxed with a cornice molding at the brick and a jigsawed fascia trim across the front.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The cellar under the brick part of the house is accessible from the exterior only. It is divided into two rooms by the center brick partition. The cellar under the frame addition of the house is accessible only from the kitchen.
  - b. First floor: The brick portion of the house is divided into two rooms by a brick wall in the middle of the house. The frame addition has one room, the kitchen. There is a fireplace in each room and stairways in the east and west corners of the house.
  - c. Second floor: The plan is similar to the first floor except each of the rooms was divided into smaller rooms. The partition in the southeast room was removed 1980-82. The attic is entered by a stairway in the north corner of the brick portion.
  - d. Attic: The attic is unfinished, divided into two rooms by the brick wall that was originally the exterior.
2. Stairways: The east stairway is an open-string, straight-run stair for the first four treads, then winding up. A bannister with molded handrail and three turned balusters at each tread runs from the newel to the wall enclosing the winders.

The stair in the west corner of the kitchen is open-string, straight-run for three treads, then winding up through a doorway. A bannister has been removed at the head of the stairway. Behind a door in the kitchen is an open-rise stairway leading down to the cellar.

A stairway to the attic from the second floor is a close-string, straight-run for two treads, then winding up through a doorway. There is no handrail. There is evidence that this stairwell extended down through the first floor to the cellar.

3. Flooring: The flooring is wide wood planks, tongue and groove on the two main floors of the house. The attic is floored with wood planks. In the cellar under the brick structure is a dirt floor and under the frame addition is a concrete floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the brick portion of the house, the fireplace walls are all paneled wood. The southeast room on the first floor has a cupboard to one side of the fireplace. The cupboard has a pull-out serving board and plate grooves on the shelves. The architraves of the fireplace and cupboard are crossetted. The original paint color on this paneling is apparently gray. In the northwest room, the parlor, the chimney breast is paneled, originally painted a bluish green. The fireplace walls on the second floor are all paneled, originally painted blue.

The other walls in the brick portion are plastered, with a chair rail. In the southeast room on the first floor, there was stenciling on the ceiling and a stenciled frieze. The bedroom above this room had a partition in it. The removal of this partition in 1980-82 revealed a stenciled ceiling and walls. The northwest room still has its partition of beaded wood planks. There is stenciling in the stairwell above the second-floor line.

The walls in the frame portion of the house are all plastered. The cellar walls were whitewashed at one time.

5. Doorways and doors: Paneled wood doors have wood frames and trim. A wide doorway between the common room and the parlor has a pair of glass doors. All doors are painted ivory.
6. Notable hardware: "L" hinges with round-head nails are on the doors in the southeast wall, first floor. "H" hinges with round-head nails are on the door at the stairway to the attic in the second-floor room.
7. Mechanical equipment: Fireplaces throughout the house have recently been re-opened and re-plastered. They have stepped facades and wooden mantels. Plumbing was installed in the frame portion 1980-82. Electricity was installed in the house 1980-82.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces southwest towards a row of large houses across the street.

2. Historic landscape design: In its original setting, there were two large sycamore trees, five feet in diameter, on each side of the sidewalk at the entrance, probably planted as "bride and groom" trees when the house was built. The trees remain at the old site.

Prepared by: John P. White  
Project Supervisor  
Historic American Buildings Survey  
June 1975

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Deed Books: Kent County Court House.

Orphans Court Books: Kent County Court House.

Kent County Mutual Insurance Company insurance policies: Delaware Archives, Hall of Records, Dover, Delaware.

#### B. Secondary Sources:

Beers, D. G. Atlas of the State of Delaware. Philadelphia: Pomery and Beers, 1868.

Conrad, Henry C. History of the State of Delaware. 3 Vols. Wilmington: Published by the Author, 1908.

Scharf, J. Thomas. History of Delaware 1609-1888. 2 Vols. Philadelphia: L. J. Richards and Company, 1888.

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, State of Delaware, and was financed with funds provided by the State of Delaware. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1975 at the Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office, Dover, Delaware, by John P. White (Assistant Professor, Texas Tech University), Project Supervisor; James Stewart (University of Delaware), Sally Schwartz (Harvard University), Project Historians; Charles B. Tonetti (Syracuse University), Architect; Student Assistant Architects, Scott Barnard (University of Pennsylvania), Frederick K. Read (University of Notre Dame), and Mark T. Wellen (Texas Tech University). The written data were edited by Alison K. Hoagland, Historian, in the HABS office in January 1983.